

BACKGROUND:

The relationship between stuttering and sentence complexity has been studied with mixed results (see Buhr & Zebrowski, 2009, for review). It has been established that children with autism may exhibit disfluency, including stuttering and nonstuttering like disfluencies (SLDs; NSLDs), cluttering and/or atypical disfluency (AD) (Scott et al., 2014). Non-stuttering like disfluency has been shown to indicate **difficulties with formulation**, especially for **more complex sentences** (Yaruss et al., 1999). The relationship between disfluency and complexity of sentences in the autistic population specifically has not yet been studied.

PURPOSE:

To understand **the relationship between disfluency and complexity of sentences** in the autistic population. Results will help add to the database of literature to better inform assessment and treatment within the autistic population.

METHODS:

- In-depth analysis of a 16-year-old with autism
- Sentences from a five-minute monologue were coded for syntactic complexity and disfluency
- Types of disfluency included stuttering-like disfluencies (SLDs; i.e., part-word repetitions, single syllable whole word repetitions with tension, prolongations, blocks); non-stuttering like disfluencies (NSLDs; i.e., word repetitions without tension, phrase repetitions, revisions, interjections); atypical disfluencies (ADs; i.e., word-final disfluencies, mid-word insertions, broken words); cluttering (i.e., atypical pausing, over-coarticulation).

The frequency of disfluency overall increased with increased complexity of sentence structure.

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PRELIMINARY RESULTS:

Results of the analysis revealed that the **frequency of disfluency overall** (including SLDs, NSLDs, ADs and cluttering) **increased** with **increased complexity** of sentence structure. The **majority of the disfluencies associated with increased sentence complexity** were those **other than SLDs**. Overall, the majority of the participant's sentences were **simple**, although compound and complex sentences seemed to be emerging, as indicated by a small number of these sentence types identified within the monologue.

DISCUSSION:

The presence of non-stuttering like disfluency has been shown to suggest difficulties with language formulation (Yaruss et al., 1999). This has been found to be especially true for **more complex sentence structures**. Given that the analysis for the current study resulted in increased disfluency trending with increased sentence complexity, results indicate a **potential connection between language formulation difficulties** (e.g., difficulties with planning and/or syntactic development of ideas) **and disfluency in autism**. If language difficulties were to underlie disfluency in autism, implications for assessment and treatment might focus more in the **areas of language**, which is different from existing protocols of stuttering assessment and treatment. Further research is needed in larger samples to confirm this pattern in autism spectrum disorders.